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KANT'S HIGHEST GOOD: THE "BECK-SILBER CONTROVERSY" IN THE SPANISH-SPEAKING WORLD

Alonso Villarán

In the 1960s Lewis White Beck criticized Kant's highest good as a moral concept. In 1963 John Silber responded. Thus, the "Beck-Silber controversy." This paper explores such controversy in the Spanish literature. It begins identifying four criticisms: the problems of *heteronomy*, *derivation*, *impossibility*, and *irrelevance*. It then identifies a new problem rescued from the Spanish literature: *dualism*. After categorizing, following Matthew Caswell, the Spanish defenses into *revisionists*, *secularizers*, and *maximalists*, this paper assesses these defenses. The paper also translates sections of such literature into English and leaves us closer to a complete defense of the highest good by salvaging what it can of the Spanish literature's unique points.

1. Introduction

As even its name itself reveals, Kant's idea of the highest good has a very important place in his philosophy. The idea is found in most of his major works, including those devoted to answering the three fundamental questions: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope? I am referring to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (the first *Critique*), the *Critique of Practical Reason* (the second *Critique*), and the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (the *Religion*). Moreover, the highest good is ultimately the answer to the second and third questions, being defined as a world where virtue is rewarded with happiness.¹

Many criticize Kant for proposing the ultimate marriage of virtue and happiness. In the English-speaking world, the critics of Kant's doctrine of the highest good are led by Lewis White Beck who—in his *A Commentary on the Critique of Practical Reason*—put into question the moral importance of the concept. Beck's negative assessment motivated Silber's response, "The Importance of the Highest Good in Kant's Ethics." Together, they sparked the so-called "Beck-Silber controversy"—one that, with subsequent critics

¹For a justification of this definition, see Villarán, "Overcoming the Problem of *Impossibility* in Kant's Idea of the Highest Good."



and defenders (defenders who, as Caswell² clarifies, can be classified as revisionists, secularizers, and maximalists), lasts until our days.

In this paper, I will introduce and critically assess the parallel development of the “Beck-Silber controversy” in the Spanish literature. For this purpose, I translate into English sections of such literature. Regarding the critics, the paper reveals a problem not identified by Beck and his followers, which is here called *dualism*. I do not merely present the problem, but take the opportunity to tackle it with a tentative response. Regarding the defenders, I argue that (a) most of their efforts to save the highest good are flawed and that (b) all of them are incomplete. Some of the defenses do leave us closer to a flawless and complete defense of the highest good, but the goal remains unattained. Ultimately, in addition to learning about the Spanish contributions, the reader will know what a complete defense of the highest good requires (what problems it needs to address), together with how it should look (what style of defense is the most appropriate). This information will serve both the English and Spanish literature on the topic.

The few Spanish-speaking philosophers that have researched Kant’s highest good are for the most part aware of the “Beck-Silber controversy.” Their work is nurtured by this bibliography. Their own contributions, though, are not yet part of the English literature. Part of my intention in writing this article is to put both worlds into dialogue. Ideally, this work will motivate research and answers from its English counterparts.

The paper has the following structure. In §2, I outline the “Beck-Silber controversy”—its origin and development in the English literature. In §3, I sketch and assess the parallel development of the “Beck-Silber controversy” in the Spanish literature. In §3.1, I present Thodorocopolous’s³ criticism of the highest good (the aforementioned problem of *dualism*), together with my tentative response. In §3.2, I present Panea’s⁴ revisionist defense of the highest good, and argue how it—and, by extension, any revisionists’ defense—ultimately fails. In §3.3, I introduce Aramayo’s⁵ secularist defense, and argue how it—and, by extension, any secularizing defense—also ultimately fails. Finally, in §3.4, I outline both Gómez Caffarena’s⁶ and Vilar’s⁷ maximalist defenses. Regarding the former, I argue that, despite taking the correct approach (the maximalist), he fails by splitting Kant’s ethics in two. I then argue that the latter indeed leaves

²Caswell, “Kant’s Conception of the Highest Good, the *Gesinnung*, and the Theory of Radical Evil.”

³Thodorocopolous, “Crítica de la Noción del Bien Supremo en Kant.”

⁴Panea, “Discernimiento y Ejecución en la Ética de Kant.”

⁵Aramayo, “El Bien Supremo y sus Postulados.”

⁶Gómez Caffarena, “La Coherencia de la Filosofía Moral Kantiana” and “Respeto y Utopía.”

⁷Vilar, “El Concepto del Bien Supremo en Kant.”

us closer to a flawless and complete defense of the highest good, but that much more remains to be done.

2. The Beck-Silber Controversy: Overview and Aftermath

In the second *Critique* Kant says: "The concept of it [of the highest good] and the representation of its existence as possible by our practical reason are at the same time the *determining ground* of the pure will."⁸ Later he adds that "the moral law . . . commands to promote it."⁹ Beck disagrees. Regarding the first assertion, Beck responds that "to put the highest good as a determining ground of the will would undermine the principle of autonomy."¹⁰ Regarding the second assertion, Beck reminds us that none of the formulas of the categorical imperative—the formula of universal law,¹¹ the formula of the end in itself,¹² and the formula of the kingdom of ends¹³—have the highest good as its content. The highest good is also not found among the ends that are also duties in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (*Metaphysics*)—one's own perfection (virtue) and the happiness of others.¹⁴ Finally, the highest good does not exist independently of the moral law: "For suppose I do all in my power . . . to promote the highest good, what am I to do? Simply act out of respect of the moral law, which I already knew."¹⁵ For Beck, to reward virtue is "the task of a moral governor of the universe, not of a laborer in the vineyard."¹⁶ From this Beck concludes: "The . . . highest good is not a practical concept at all. . . . It is not important in Kant's philosophy for any practical consequence."¹⁷

A close reading reveals that the problems at play are four: *heteronomy* (the highest good undermines autonomy), *derivation* (it cannot be derived from the moral law), *impossibility* (it is impossible to promote it), and *irrelevance* (it is morally irrelevant).

Later critics have reinforced Beck's attack. Regarding *heteronomy*, Auxter¹⁸ asserts that the highest good cannot have beneficial effects on moral motivations. As Kant says in the *Groundwork*: "An action from duty has its moral worth *not in the purpose* to be attained by it but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon."¹⁹

⁸CPrR 5: 109.

⁹CPrR 5: 114

¹⁰Beck, *Commentary*, 244.

¹¹G 4: 421.

¹²G 4: 429.

¹³G 4: 434.

¹⁴MM 6: 385.

¹⁵Beck, *Commentary*, 244.

¹⁶Beck, *Commentary*, 245.

¹⁷Beck, *Commentary*, 245.

¹⁸Auxter, "The Unimportance of Kant's Highest Good."

¹⁹G 4: 399.

Regarding *derivation*, Rawls has radicalized Beck's position.²⁰ In his view, the moral law and the highest good are not merely unrelated—they are incompatible:

The highest good is incompatible with the idea of the realm of ends as the constructed object of the moral law: it cannot be that constructed object, for there is nothing in the CI-procedure [the categorical imperative procedure] that can generate precepts requiring us to proportion happiness to virtue.²¹

Regarding *impossibility*, Murphy highlights the obscurity of moral intentions in order to deny that the highest good can be promoted.²² In fact, how can we reward virtue, if we cannot assess it? As Kant says in relation to this topic: "In fact, it is absolutely impossible by means of experience to make out with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action otherwise in conformity with duty rested simply on moral grounds."²³ Friedman—who, despite this criticism, is ultimately a defender—also claims *impossibility*, although in his opinion it arises because of the relative nature of happiness.²⁴ As Kant clarifies, happiness "is such an indeterminate concept that, although every human being wishes to attain this, he can still never say . . . what he really wishes and wills."²⁵ What, then, should we give as a reward?

The problem of *irrelevance* has not changed: the highest good does not add new duties and cannot be the determining ground of the will—therefore, it is morally irrelevant.

Not all reactions to the highest good are critical, though. In his response to Beck, Silber gives some thought to the problems under discussion, but concentrates on that of *irrelevance*.

The first problem Silber tackles, although insufficiently, is *impossibility*: "It is obvious, Beck's denial notwithstanding, that in rearing children, serving on juries, and grading papers one tries to do and actually can do something 'about apportioning happiness in accordance to desert.'"²⁶ His examples are good, but there is certainly more to be said about this problem. To begin with, Silber could have foreseen and responded to the arguments soon to be made by Murphy and later by Friedman. He does not elaborate his own insight further, and so the strength of Silber's article is not found here, as a response to the problem of *impossibility*.

Silber does a better job regarding *derivation* and *irrelevance*, problems that he deals with simultaneously. In short, Silber sees the highest good as the compilation of the above-mentioned ends that are also duties in

²⁰Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*.

²¹Rawls, *Lectures*, 316.

²²Murphy, "The Highest Good as Content for Kant's Ethical Formalism."

²³G 4: 407.

²⁴Friedman, "The Importance and Function of Kant's Highest Good."

²⁵G 4: 418.

²⁶Silber, "Importance," 183.

the *Metaphysics*: one's own perfection (virtue) and the happiness of others. Under this interpretation, the highest good would clearly follow from the moral law. But why did Kant need to perform such compilation? According to Silber, he did so to complement the categorical imperative—an imperative that, by itself, would not be suited to provide concrete moral guidance. Its moral relevance would precisely reside in this function. In Silber's words, "the concept of the highest good, while following from the moral law, adds content to the abstract form of the categorical imperative and gives direction to moral volition."²⁷

Silber says nothing regarding *heteronomy*, but if the highest good follows from the moral law, as he claims, the problem would be implicitly solved.

In this way, Beck and Silber inaugurated a debate that has lasted through today. And just like Beck's criticisms inspired others to follow his lead, Silber's defense has had the same effect. As it has been already mentioned, thanks to Caswell we can organize the defenders in three categories: revisionists, secularizers, and maximalists. With different strategies, and in different styles, they try to overcome the problems attached to the highest good.

Briefly, the revisionists think that the highest good solves some supposed problems to be found in the pillars of Kant's ethics—for example, the abstract formalism of the moral law, as we just saw with Silber.²⁸ The secularizers, in turn, try to defend the highest good but through its secularization, i.e., leaving aside the religious postulates that Kant attaches to it—God and immortality—and the quintessential component of deserved happiness.²⁹ Finally, the maximalists try to save the highest good in its entirety and without presupposing that Kant introduced the concept to rectify earlier problems.³⁰ The maximalists are the most conservative interpreters; the secularizers, the most liberal.

²⁷Silber, "Importance," 193.

²⁸Regarding the revisionists we find—besides Silber and Friedman—Mark Packer, "The Highest Good in Kant's Psychology of Motivation."

²⁹Regarding the secularizers we find, among others, Barnes, "In Defense of Kant's Doctrine of the Highest Good," Guyer, "Beauty, Systematicity, and the Highest Good," Kleingeld, "What Do the Virtuous Hope For?," Moran, "Kant's Concept of the Highest Good" and "The Ethical Community as Ground of Moral Action," Nenon, "The Highest Good and the Happiness of Others," Nuyen, "Kant on God, Immortality, and the Highest Good," O'Neill, "Kant on Reason and Religion," Reath, "Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant," Smith, "Worthiness to be Happy and Kant's Concept of the Highest Good," van der Linden, *Kantian Ethics and Socialism*, and Zeldin, "The Summum Bonum, The Moral Law, and the Existence of God."

³⁰Regarding the maximalists we find—besides Caswell—Anderson-Gold, *Unnecessary Evil*, Bowman, "A Derivation of Kant's Concept of the Highest Good" [translated into Spanish by Martínez as "Una Deducción del Concepto de Sumo Bien Kantiano"], Denis, "Autonomy and the Highest Good," Engstrom, "The Concept of the Highest Good in Kant's Moral Theory," Godlove, "Moral Actions, Moral Lives," Insole, "The Irreducible Importance of Religious Hope in Kant's Conception of the Highest Good," Mariña, "Making Sense of Kant's Highest Good," O'Connell, "Happiness Proportioned to Virtue," Ostaric, "Works of Genius as Sensible Exhibitions of the Idea of the Highest Good," Wike, *Kant on Happiness in Ethics*, Wike and Showler, "Kant's Concept of the Highest Good and the Archetype-Ectype

Recapitulating, we have at least four problems and three styles of defense. The problems are those of *heteronomy*, *derivation*, *impossibility*, and *irrelevance*. These can be faced as revisionists, secularizers, or maximalists.

The “Beck-Silber controversy” started in the English-speaking literature, but has impacted academia elsewhere. Within Spanish-language scholarly literature, for example, we find some scarce yet valuable interpretations—primarily attempts of defense. In what follows, I will outline and evaluate these contributions—starting with a critic.

3. The Beck-Silber Controversy in the Spanish-Speaking World

3.1. Thodoracopolous and the Problem of Dualism

The group of the highest good’s critics, we just saw, is composed of Beck and those who regret Kant’s inclusion of the highest good in his ethical system due to the problems of *heteronomy*, *derivation*, *impossibility*, and *irrelevance*. The article that seems to be the first in Spanish regarding Kant’s highest good is also a critique. It is a small article published by Thodoracopolous—by then President of the Academy of Science in Athens—in the early 1970s. Interestingly, the criticism announced in the title is none of those identified by Beck, but one that we may call the problem of *dualism*.

The critique comes at the end of the text and touches on Kant’s apparent inconsistency in speaking of human happiness as sensible and the promise—granted by the highest good—of receiving it as a reward for virtue in an afterlife:³¹

How would it be possible that happiness, an empirical notion, could accompany the soul after the death of the body? Even if it were assumed that there is certain symmetrical relation between morality and happiness—something even questionable during human life—, why would it be necessary that the symmetry between these two of such different magnitudes will be prolonged after the death of the body, of a body that—according to Kant—is a preliminary condition of the empirical world and origin both of happiness and of human disgrace?³²

In other words, if the highest good will ultimately be realized in an afterlife (as the postulate of immortality³³ indicates), but human happiness is grounded in corporeity, then the reward for virtue, happiness, will have no value.³⁴ Because of this, Kant’s idea of the highest good would make no sense.

Distinction,” and Wood, *Kant’s Moral Religion*. My works on Kant’s highest good are also maximalist defenses: “Overcoming the Problems of *Heteronomy* and *Derivation* in Kant’s Idea of the Highest Good,” “El Sumo Bien Kantiano,” “Overcoming the Problem of *Impossibility*,” and “Kant’s Idea of the Highest Good: Its Ethical Importance for the Overcoming of Evil and to Answer the ‘Whither’ Question.”

³¹All translations that follow are made by the author of this paper.

³²Thodoracopolous, “Crítica de la Noción,” 7.

³³CPR A811/B839 and CPrR 5: 122.

³⁴Kant defines happiness as sensible in several places. For instance, in the *Groundwork* he says happiness is the entire satisfaction of our needs and inclinations (4:405). In the second *Critique*, he in turn defines it as “the state of a rational being in the world in the whole of

This criticism, though, may be built upon a false premise: that in the afterlife, for Kant, we will be purely spiritual beings. Did Kant really believe that? The obvious place to look for an answer would be the religion he professed, Christianity. Paraphrasing Sandel, who claims that "although he was a Christian, Kant did not base morality on divine authority,"³⁵ we can say that "although Kant did not base morality [highest good included] on divine authority, he was a Christian." Now being Christian implies certain beliefs—quintessentially the resurrection of the body.

Aramayo—the Spanish-speaking secularizer—takes this thread to indirectly answer Thodoracopolous: "Most probably Kant has *in mente* a process of resurrection . . . (with all security that of Christian resurrection . . .) because without it, his definition of happiness as satisfaction of needs becomes hardly tenable."³⁶ So assuming that Kant, a Pietist, had the resurrection of the body in mind, as it is safe to assume, the problem of *dualism* vanishes: the promise of happiness contained in the highest good will be ultimately actualized in a future life, but still in embodied beings.

Of course, the Christian link does not solve the problem philosophically. Does the resurrection of the body fit with Kant's philosophy? To answer this, we have to look to the English-speaking literature, outside the "Beck-Silber controversy." Specifically, I refer to Bunch, who answers with a straightforward yes—and with good reasons.³⁷

Bunch starts identifying two places where Kant speaks negatively of the resurrection of the body: the *Religion*³⁸ and *The Conflict of the Faculties* (the *Conflict*).³⁹ Let's consider Kant's words in the *Religion*:

The hypothesis of the spirituality of the rational beings of this world, according to which the body can remain dead on earth and yet the same person still be living . . . this hypothesis is more congenial to reason, not merely because it is impossible to conceive a matter endowed with thought, but, most of all, because of the contingency to which our existence after death would

whose existence *everything goes according to his wish and will*, and rests, therefore, on the harmony of nature with his whole end as well as with the essential determining ground of his will" (5:124). In the *Metaphysics*, to mention one more definition, happiness is the "satisfaction with one's state . . . with what nature bestows" (6:387). Kant, though, recognizes other states of well-being, such as contentment and beatitude. Contentment is "analogous of happiness that must necessarily accompany consciousness of virtue . . . a negative satisfaction with one's existence . . . which cannot be called happiness [emphasis added] because it does not depend upon the positive concurrence of a feeling" (CPrR 5:117–119). Beatitude, in turn, resembles contentment but is greater insofar as it implies "complete [and not merely contingent] independence from inclinations and needs" (CPrR 5:119). Regarding these distinctions, it is important to highlight that, when Kant defines the highest good, he speaks of happiness in proportion to virtue—and not of contentment or beatitude. For a thorough discussion of Kant's definition of happiness, contentment, and beatitude, see Wike, *Kant on Happiness*, 1–25.

³⁵Sandel, *Justice*, 107.

³⁶Aramayo, "El Bien Supremo," 102.

³⁷Bunch, "The Resurrection of the Body as a Practical Postulate."

³⁸R 6: 128n.

³⁹CF 7: 40.

be exposed if we made it rest merely on the coherence of a certain clump of matter under a certain form, whereas we can conceive the permanence of a simple substance as natural to it.—On the latter presupposition (of spirituality) reason can, however, neither find in dragging along, through eternity, a body which, however purified, must yet consist . . . of the same material which constitutes the body's organic basis and which, in live, the body itself never quite grew fond of; nor can it render comprehensible what this calcareous earth, of which the body consists, should be doing in heaven, i.e. in another region of the world where other matters might presumably constitute the condition of the existence and preservation of living beings.⁴⁰

Despite this and a similar remark in the *Conflict*, Bunch claims that a sensibly conditioned afterlife, is “not only ‘more congenial to reason’ than a purely spiritual one, but a subjectively necessary belief, a ‘practical postulate.’”⁴¹ He offers three reasons for this.

First, “only a sensibly conditioned future life makes sense of the happiness that should be part of a transcendent highest good.”⁴² Here Bunch is doing the opposite of Thodoracopolous. While the latter claims that the highest good does not make sense because the future life for Kant was purely spiritual—an idea that he does not develop but merely asserts—Bunch claims that Kant must have believed in the resurrection of the body because, otherwise, the doctrine of the highest good would make no sense.

Second, “only a sensible conditioned afterlife makes sense of the moral striving that should take place there.”⁴³ As Kant states in the second *Critique*:

Complete conformity of the will with the moral law is . . . *holiness*, a perfection of which no rational being of the sensible world is capable at any moment of his existence. Since it is nevertheless required as practically necessary, it can only be found in an *endless progress* toward that complete conformity. . . . This endless progress is, however, possible only on the presupposition of the *existence* and personality of the same rational being continuing *endlessly* (which is called the immortality of the soul).⁴⁴

That such moral progress will continue in a future world indicates that we will still be embodied beings, since the corresponding striving is in great measure caused by our corporeity: the law of happiness opposing the moral law. As Kant says in the *Groundwork*, “if I were only [a member of the intelligible world], all my actions would always be in conformity with the autonomy of the will.”⁴⁵

Third, “Kant’s notion of the ‘absolute unity’ of the human person requires that we conceive the afterlife as embodied.”⁴⁶ A place where Kant

⁴⁰R 6:129n.

⁴¹Bunch, “Resurrection,” 50.

⁴²Bunch, “Resurrection,” 50.

⁴³Bunch, “Resurrection,” 54.

⁴⁴CPpR 5: 122.

⁴⁵G 4: 454.

⁴⁶Bunch, “Resurrection,” 55.

states this absolute unity is the *Metaphysics*, when philosophizing about marriage right: "But acquiring a member of a human being is at the same time acquiring the whole person, since a person is an absolute unity."⁴⁷ Note that Kant is saying "absolute" and not "relative" unity.

In sum, with these three reasons Bunch claims that to deny the resurrection of the body is more "expensive," philosophically speaking, than affirming it: it demands many more revisions of Kant's other views. These reasons could have eventually moved Kant to retract his marginal remarks in the *Religion* and the *Conflict*.

Bunch also develops a fourth and final point to "assuage the worry that 'saddling' Kant with such a view is absurd or uncharitable."⁴⁸ The claim is that "the resurrection of the body was a live option among Kant's philosophical and literary contemporaries."⁴⁹ Now in addition to assuaging worries, this point parallels and reinforces the reason given before regarding Kant's Christianity: not only he was a Christian, which again implies belief in such resurrection, but such belief was taken seriously by his peers.

Even if the preceding answer to the problem of *dualism* does not convince the reader,⁵⁰ this review of the Spanish literature is already profitable: the problems that endanger the highest good are not reducible to those pointed out by Beck and his followers. One may suppose that this discussion is already in place in the English literature, but it is not. There is a debate around the resurrection of the body in Kant's philosophy of religion—as the referred work of Bunch shows—but the issue has not been raised as a criticism of Kant's idea of the highest good, as it has in the Spanish literature. In other words, the problem of *dualism* is not yet part of the English version of the "Beck-Silber controversy." This is what opens up new discussions around the highest good. One could reject, for instance, Aramayo's indirect response to Thodoracopolous, insisting with more elaborated arguments that Kant was a dualist, and that this wounds the reasonableness of the highest good. One could also side with Aramayo, and so on and so forth.

3.2. Panea, the Revisionist

As summarized, the revisionists are led by Silber and argue that the highest good is morally important since it corrects some supposed problems to be found at the pillars of Kant's ethics (as these are established in the *Groundwork* and the *Analytic of the second Critique*). In the Spanish-speaking world Panea follows this trend. His response to the problem of

⁴⁷MM 6: 278.

⁴⁸Bunch, "Resurrection," 50.

⁴⁹Bunch, "Resurrection," 57.

⁵⁰The thesis that Kant embraced the resurrection of the body is controversial. One who denies it is Keith Yandell, "A Response to the Papers: Who is the True Kant?"

irrelevance is that, if the highest good were impossible, “the wellspring of morality would dry completely.”⁵¹

To understand Panea’s thesis we need to remember how the highest good works as the bridge between ethics and religion. In the first *Critique*, and more specifically the second section of the Canon of Pure Reason, Kant explains this bridge as follows.⁵² The moral law commands the promotion of the highest good, i.e., a world where people are virtuous and proportionally happy. Now since the moral law commands it, the highest good must be possible. But the complete harmonization of happiness and virtue can be possible only if God exists and if the soul is immortal. Therefore, it is rational to postulate their existence. In this way the highest good—originally a moral concept—opens the door to religion and to the hope for a future happy life.

Panea’s argument is that if that door were closed, i.e., if the promise of personal happiness were denied, something, namely moral *motivation*, would be eventually irreversibly lost. The following two quotes summarize his position:

In the domain of the individual, Kantian morality, the morality of duty, is also one of hope, because if he who does what he ought to, cannot hope for anything, the wellspring of morality will end up drying out. Said in another way, morality in Kant will risk dissolving considering two motives: on one side, if *eudaimony* sits as its principle, i.e. the principle of happiness, morality will end up finding a sweet death (euthanasia); on the other hand, *if all hope for happiness is barred from us* [emphasis added], morality will end up dying of sadness, of starvation: i.e. we will attend to a progressive weakening of the moral interest, to a discouragement that will become chronic, and to a demoralization that will end up emptying of meaning the question “why keep being moral?”

Panea adds that this affects morality at the level of execution, not of discernment:

Not at the *grounding* level, but at the level of the realizability of the ethical project, the hope in the possibility of the highest good affects the moral effort itself, that will remain vain and illusory, although, of course, well grounded, well intended. . . . But then, although success is not determinative regarding *how* I ought to act, it becomes vital at the hour of *performing* that which I ought, because if nothing results or no result is to be expected out of the moral effort, the effort itself will lose, for Kant, meaningfulness and consistency, whereupon, the wellspring of morality will end up drying. For all this . . . duty in itself is unsustainable without the hope for happiness, or, at least, without the future possibility of it.⁵³

The problem with Panea, and with the revisionists in general, is one we may call *illusion*: they see problems where Kant saw none. As Caswell puts

⁵¹Panea, “Discernimiento y Ejecución,” 398.

⁵²CPR A804/B832–A819/B847.

⁵³Panea, “Discernimiento y Ejecución,” 412.

it, the revisionists "must either ignore or judge as inadequate the solutions to the problems . . . offered in the *Analytic of the second Critique*."⁵⁴ Specifically regarding the problem of *motivation*, Panea must deny that the feeling of respect for the moral law is the only proper and sufficient incentive of the will. As Kant states in the second *Critique*, "respect for the moral law is therefore the sole and also the undoubted moral incentive, and this feeling is also directed to no object except on this basis."⁵⁵ The moral relevance of the highest good, hence, must lie somewhere else, not in *self-interested* moral *motivation*—which, in addition to being inaccurate, as just shown, reinforces one of the other problems at stake, i.e., the problem of *heteronomy*.

Imagine that Kant only wrote the *Groundwork*, where the highest good as a world where virtue is rewarded with happiness is absent. Does this absence undermine the work in any substantial way? I do not think so and I do not think Kant thinks that either. The moral law would still be there, unconditionally commanding to treat humanity always as an end, at odds with the principle of happiness, and reminding us that the latter is not the most important thing in the world. Or envision an atheist Kantian, one unconvinced by the religious features of Kant's philosophy. Could she not still, throughout her life, honor the categorical imperative? I do not see why not. Now if this is the case, then the idea of the highest good, which among other things makes it reasonable to expect a future reward for our goodness, is not necessary for moral motivation.

We could very well, hence, restrict ourselves to the wisdom of the *Groundwork* and live a sober moral life. This, of course, does not deny other potential reasons for the moral—and not merely religious—relevance of the highest good. But the promise of happiness that accompanies the highest good is not one of them.

What to do, then, with Kant's assertion in the first *Critique*?

Thus without a God and a world that is now not visible to us but is hoped for, the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation of admiration but not incentives for resolve and realization, because they would not fulfill the whole end that is natural for every rational being and determined *a priori* and necessarily through the very same pure reason.⁵⁶

Here I take Kant as saying that the ultimate failure of the highest good would hurt *selfless* moral *motivation*. This is so because such failure is a failure of the moral law. Why? Because, as Kant states in several places, the moral law commands the highest good.⁵⁷ So if the highest good were impossible, the moral law would be commanding a chimera, and those committed to this moral project would know, beforehand, that their efforts are condemned to failure. Would not their *selfless* moral *motivation* be hurt?

⁵⁴Caswell, "Kant's Conception," 186.

⁵⁵CPR 5: 78.

⁵⁶CPR A 813/B841.

⁵⁷CPR A808/B836, CPR 5:114, R 6:97.

This is precisely Kant's point in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, where he presents the case of an ethical atheist, "Spinoza," who "does not demand any advantage for himself from his conformity to this [the moral] law, whether in this or another world," but yet witnesses again and again that the moral world that that same moral law orders—the highest good—is not getting closer, but rather farther away.⁵⁸ Facing this, "Spinoza" cannot help but regard the highest good as impossible: "The end, therefore, which this well-intentioned person had and should have before his eyes in his conformity with the moral law, he would certainly have to give up as impossible."⁵⁹ Either that, or "Spinoza" would have to:

assume the existence of a **moral** author of the world, i.e. of God, from a practical point of view, i.e., in order to form a concept of at least the possibility of the final end that is prescribed to him by morality—which he well can do, since it is at least not self-contradictory.⁶⁰

As we can see, this "Spinoza" is not worried about his happiness, but about the possibility of contributing to what the moral law ultimately orders. In other words, it is his *selfless*, and not his *selfish* moral motivation that matters.

This insight, by the way, does not imply a later revision, done by Kant himself, of the basic pillars of his own ethical system. The highest good is not artificially added from outside this system to rectify some supposed problems (like that of *motivation*), as the revisionists believe. Rather, it evolves out of the moral law to tell us something else about morality—for instance, where the moral law is leading us and what kind of world it envisions, as Kant outlines in the *Religion*.⁶¹ In other words, the highest good is presented to add to, not rectify, Kant's moral system, enriching the moral landscape. As such, the problem of *illusion* remains.

That said, Panea is not only prey to the problem of *illusion*: he is also prey to another which is typical among the defenders, a problem that we may call *incompleteness*. The problem of *incompleteness* consists in leaving unsolved—usually, but not only, due to a lack of recognition—some or all the other problems at stake. In the case of the revisionists like Panea, they focus on the problem of *irrelevance* but pass over those of *heteronomy*, *derivation*, *impossibility*, and *dualism*. So because of *illusion* and *incompleteness*, Panea's defense of Kant's highest good fails.

3.3. Aramayo, the Secularizer

The secularizers, let's remember, try to save the highest good through its secularization. As Caswell explains:

⁵⁸CJ 5:452.

⁵⁹CJ 5:452

⁶⁰CJ 5:453.

⁶¹R 6:5.

A leading trend in the interpretation of the highest good, especially in the English-speaking literature, attempts to extract a "secularized" version of the highest good from Kant's account. The secularizers hope to save the highest good by divesting it of its difficult religious features, including Kant's idea that in the highest good, happiness will exist in proportion to virtue.⁶²

In the Spanish-speaking literature, Aramayo follows this trend. In his view, Kant's works on the philosophy of history—like the *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (the *Idea*)—offer an alternative, secular version of the highest good. This version, in Aramayo's opinion, is "much more respectful with the basic axiom of the formal ethic, than those sustained in his [Kant's] moral theology."⁶³

In the renewed highest good, Aramayo argues, the focus is no longer the person, but the human species, and the element of proportionality, together with the postulates of God and of immortality, are left aside: "In this framework the species [not each person, but a future generation of humans] will attain its destiny [the highest good] by means of antagonism [foreseen as the hidden plan of nature]."⁶⁴ Even the highest good is here redefined, Aramayo claims, as the "complete unfolding of our natural dispositions . . . oriented to a better use of reason."⁶⁵ This, in some way, will lead not only to a more ethical world, but also to a happier one.

That antagonism brings flourishing is explained by Kant with this example:

Just as trees in a forest, precisely because each of them seeks to take air and sun from the other, are constrained to look for them above themselves, and thereby achieve a beautiful straight growth; whereas those in freedom and separated from one another, that put forth their branches as they like, grow stunted, crooked and awry. All culture and art that adorn humanity, and the most beautiful social order, are the fruits of unsociability.⁶⁶

The great advantage that this secular version has, Aramayo clarifies, is that it overcomes the problem of *heteronomy*. Why? Because the hope for happiness that the highest good contains is not one's own, but that of future generations. As Aramayo explains, "to work for the sake of the descendants omits the search for one's own happiness . . . the personal interest stays completely within parenthesis in the decisions aimed to that goal of generational progress."⁶⁷

Aramayo does not mention the other problems at stake—*derivation*, *impossibility*, and *irrelevance*—presumably because he does not recognize them. One may think that he has developed the means to deal with them,

⁶²Caswell, "Kant's Conception," 186.

⁶³Aramayo, "El Bien Supremo," 114.

⁶⁴Aramayo, "El Bien Supremo," 112.

⁶⁵Aramayo, "El Bien Supremo," 112.

⁶⁶I 8: 22.

⁶⁷Aramayo, "El Bien Supremo," 114.

but he misses the opportunity to show it. Instead, Aramayo speaks of another problem that this version of the highest good generates, one characteristic of secular interpretations: a problem we may call *injustice*.

The problem of *injustice* refers to the individual fate of living human beings and those who have died, who will never enjoy the distributive justice that the highest good promises and that they may have earned. Aramayo says: "At first sight, nonetheless, [this version of the highest good] contains a serious inconvenience of equal caliber, namely: the happiness proportionally adequate to virtue would not be happen in the same moral agent that deserves it, but a bliss is tilled that the descendants will collect."⁶⁸ Despite this, in Aramayo's opinion the problem of *injustice* is not so bad: "Since each generation will wield a higher degree of morality than the former, it is just that it be happier than its ancestors."⁶⁹

Aramayo's answer to the problem of *injustice*, though, is unsatisfactory for the following reason. It may be the case that Kant's contemporaries were morally better and happier than their ancestors, that we are better versions of eighteenth-century humanity, and that two and a half centuries from now our descendants improve even more. This, though, does not do justice to the millions of people who, despite being good, lived miserable lives due to sickness, poverty, natural disasters, crime, war, etc. At the individual level, therefore, *injustice* still prevails. To say, as Aramayo does, that their deserved happiness will be harvested by future human beings only makes things worse: it implies regarding them merely as means, and so the *injustice* duplicates.

Now even accepting the unsatisfactory answer given by Aramayo to the problem of *injustice*, he is still subject to the other criticism that affects secularizers as a group, a problem we may call *disloyalty*: they betray Kant for Kant. Caswell puts it in the following way:

When we deny the theological nature of the highest good, we deny almost all the significance he [Kant] clearly believed the highest good had, as the link between morality and rational religion. Of course, we are greater friends of the truth, but the rejection of so much of Kant's thought should be undertaken as a last resort.⁷⁰

From the first *Critique* to the *Religion*, the highest good links morality and religion. In the first *Critique*, the highest good (also called the moral world) is the answer to the questions of "What should I do?" and "What may I hope"? It is a duty to promote the highest good and one can rationally hope to enjoy it one day. As Kant says, "Thus God and a future life are two presuppositions that are not to be separated from the obligation [to promote the highest good] that pure reason imposes on us in accordance

⁶⁸Aramayo, "El Bien Supremo," 113.

⁶⁹Aramayo, "El Bien Supremo," 114.

⁷⁰Caswell, "Kant's Conception," 187.

with principles of that very same reason."⁷¹ Twelve years later, in the *Religion*, Kant insists that, through the highest good (also called the ethical community), "morality thus inevitably leads to religion."⁷² This leads us to agree with Caswell: the highest good's secularization should be a last resort.⁷³

In the case of Aramayo, nevertheless, it is even doubtful that, in the *Idea*, Kant is speaking of the highest good. Kant does speak of a universal cosmopolitan condition that may resemble the highest good, but the latter is not mentioned, at least not under that name. These are Kant's words in the *Idea*: "This gives hope that after many transforming revolutions, in the end that which nature has as its aim will finally come about—a universal *cosmopolitan condition*, as the womb in which all original predispositions of the human species will be developed."⁷⁴ And even if it were the case that Kant has the highest good in mind, though, this work is previous to the second *Critique*, where we find the most extensive account of the highest good, one in which the postulates of God and immortality,⁷⁵ together with the proportionality of happiness and virtue that the highest good entails,⁷⁶ are reaffirmed. It is easy to imagine Kant protesting Aramayo's secularization of the highest good.

Aramayo's defense, in sum, fails not only because of its *incompleteness*, but also because of problems that are typical of secular interpretations of the highest good: the problems of *injustice* and *disloyalty*.

3.4. Gómez Caffarena and Vilar, the Maximalists

The maximalists try to save the highest good in the most conservative fashion: without claiming it is there to fix previous problems or stripping it of its religious components. In the Spanish literature, Gómez Caffarena has developed an original maximalist response to the problem of *derivation*. The highest good, he argues, must not be understood as an exogenous or even contradictory element in Kant's ethics. Instead, the highest good is a complementary and even more original—chronologically speaking—element of it.

To begin with, the moral law and the highest good would be more closely related than Kant's interpreters—such as Beck and Rawls—tend to

⁷¹CPR A811/B839.

⁷²R 6: 6.

⁷³As an anonymous reviewer helpfully pointed out, secularizers like Moran "would likely argue that the connection between morality and religion cuts both ways, or rather, cuts more from religion than it gives to it. That is, arguably what Kant is doing with these connections between morality and religion is precisely pruning religion of anything that is not a necessary part of morality." Regarding this, I agree that Kant *tends* to prune religion of anything that is not an essential part of morality, but it is still the case that morality and religion are two different things, and that the former leads to the latter. A complete debate with the secularizers, though, will lead us astray from the goal of this paper.

⁷⁴I 8: 28

⁷⁵CPrR 5: 122–133.

⁷⁶CPrR 5: 110–111.

think. Consider the supposed strict rigidity of the formal nature of the categorical imperative, as this is defended in Kant's most formalist-inspired work: the *Groundwork*. Even in that book, Gómez Caffarena argues, the rigidity is loosened through the incorporation, in the second and third formulations of the moral law, of humans as ends in themselves and of the kingdom of ends. With their incorporation, the formalism of the moral law is ultimately overwhelmed and the distance between it and the highest good shortened. In the case of the kingdom of ends—we may add—the approaching of these two ideas almost reaches a degree of identity: because, what at last distinguishes the kingdom of ends from the highest good?

Gómez Caffarena explains the loosening of the formal nature of the moral law:

In multiple steps of his argumentation Kant shows that he is not satisfied with the first formula of the categorical imperative . . . the strictly formal . . .

Kant declares that this [categorical imperative] . . . needs justification:

We have not yet advanced so far as to prove a priori that there really is such an imperative . . . is it a necessary law *for all rational beings* always to appraise their actions in accordance with such maxims as they themselves could will to serve as universal laws?⁷⁷

As known, Kant looks for an answer to this question in the condition of “end in itself” that all human personal subjects have. . . . However: to roll back in such a way the formal criterion (1st formula) to its justification in that we must “act in such a way that humanity is used in each person always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (2nd formula), elevating us in such way as co-legislators, all for all, through the consciousness of each one (3rd formula, that of “autonomy” or of the “kingdom of ends”), equates to admitting that the formalism is *not strict* formalism; that there is always already in it something of what appears more fully in the orientation towards the “highest good.”⁷⁸

That said, Kant never renounced his formalism. As Kant himself says, “one does better if in moral judgment he follows the rigorous method and takes at his basis the universal formula of the categorical imperative.”⁷⁹ This moves Gómez Caffarena to look for a definitive solution to the problems related to the highest good by interpreting Kant's ethics as “originating from a *double* inspiration” or two wellsprings (*fuentes*): “respect” and “utopia.”⁸⁰ This, though, should not lead us to speak of two ethics in Kant—as authors like Heller suggest.⁸¹ It should not because—following the allegory—“the waters of the double source mingle.”⁸² The duality,

⁷⁷G 4: 425–426.

⁷⁸Gómez Caffarena, “La Coherencia,” 46.

⁷⁹G 4: 436–437.

⁸⁰Gómez Caffarena, “La Coherencia,” 47.

⁸¹Heller, *Crítica de la Ilustración*.

⁸²Gómez Caffarena, “La Coherencia,” 47.

though, would demand assigning a loose coherence between the ethics of the *Groundwork* and the Analytic of the second *Critique* on one hand, and the ethics of the first *Critique*, of the *Dialectic* of the second *Critique*, and of the *Religion* on the other. This looseness would be reflected in the double interpretation that one can make of the kingdom of ends:

- a) The kingdom of ends as a community of those who, out of respect to [*ante*] the absolute worth of the personal being, commit themselves (as co-legislators) to never take themselves as pure means: keystone of a morality of respect.
- b) The kingdom of ends as a community of those who, out of an overflowing solidarity, commit themselves to look for their integral good, the highest possible good of the universe: the beginning of a utopian morality.⁸³

From this perspective, the highest good is closely related to the moral law and ultimately is mixed with it, but still separated in its origins. Gómez Caffarena is aware that his view of a loose coherence implies renouncing the perfect unity of Kant's philosophical system: "My hypothesis suggests precisely the renunciation of this perfect unity of the system—without renouncing thus necessarily the system and a certain unity of it."⁸⁴

Gómez Caffarena reinforces his interpretation with a diachronic reading of Kant's works, according to which the second wellspring, i.e., utopia (and, with it, the highest good), is not only older—even pre-critical—but also the "compost [*humus*]" out of which the "germs of formalism" developed (his choice of words⁸⁵). Of course, one can protest that Kant changed his mind in the post-critical times, but the reappearance of the highest good in the *Dialectic* of the second *Critique*, the *Religion* and so on proves that he kept the doctrine.

Is Gómez Caffarena's solution to the problem of *derivation* satisfactory? I do not think so. In fact, if the highest good springs from a different "well-spring" than that of the moral law—from "utopia" instead of "respect"—it makes more sense to consider it an artificial addition and to deny its place in Kant's ethics. After all, for Kant all duties are ultimately rooted in the moral law. Proof of the latter is that Kant speaks of the categorical imperative as the "supreme principle of morality"⁸⁶ and as the "fundamental law of pure practical reason."⁸⁷ Proof can also be found in that every time Kant derives a duty, he does so from the moral law, as when he derives the duties of not committing suicide, of keeping promises, of cultivating one's

⁸³Gómez Caffarena, "Respeto y Utopía," 273.

⁸⁴Gómez Caffarena, "Respeto y Utopía," 261–262.

⁸⁵Gómez Caffarena, "La Coherencia," 49.

⁸⁶G 4: 392.

⁸⁷CPrR 5: 30.

talents and of benefiting others in the *Groundwork*.⁸⁸ The real challenge, hence, is to derive the highest good from the moral law.

In other words, Gómez Caffarena's defense fails in not seeing that there is only one ethical wellspring in Kant, the moral law, whose waters would not converge with those of the highest good, but that instead—keeping the metaphor—would flow into it, like a river that flows into the ocean. Gómez Caffarena, in other words, is prey to a problem we may call *splitting*: instead of deriving the highest good from the moral law, he splits Kant's ethics in two. To this extent—and to the extent that he does not answer the problems of *dualism*, *heteronomy*, *impossibility*, and *irrelevance* (i.e., because of *incompleteness*)—Gómez Caffarena's defense fails.

Gómez Caffarena, it has been mentioned, is not the only Spanish-speaking maximalist—another is Vilar, whose defense we now review. In his article, Vilar argues that there are two ethics in Kant: one formal—that of the *Groundwork* and the Analytic of the second *Critique*—and one material—that of the Dialectic of the second *Critique*, the *Religion*, etc. The second would be built upon the first, so they do not contradict, but rather complement each other. Vilar even speaks of a material categorical imperative, which orders to promote the highest good:

Together with the imperative of universalizing our norms of conduct (the formal imperative) [the second ethics] provides us *a priori* a material imperative that says: “act so that you promote the highest good in the world,” understanding the highest good—unlike the merely higher good, which is virtue—as the meeting of virtue and happiness.⁸⁹

Vilar's article develops in the following order. First, he recognizes that his interpretation of Kant's highest good mirrors that of Yovel.⁹⁰ Second, he asserts that the mature Kant could not erase the “whither” question⁹¹ as a moral one—one that leads to the highest good. Third, he presents a list of reactions to Kant's idea of the highest good since the days of Schleiermacher—and explains the general lack of interest in the topic until the “Beck-Silber controversy” in the English-speaking world. Fourth, he signals six features—the first four borrowed from Habermas⁹²—that would characterize Kant's “first” ethics: it is deontological, cognitivist (“it understands the righteousness of norms or commandments by analogy with the truth of assertoric or theoretical statements”⁹³), formalist, universalist, dualist, and monological. Fifth, he shows how, for Kant, the first ethics would prevail over the second.⁹⁴ Sixth, he compiles several formulations of

⁸⁸G 4: 421–423.

⁸⁹Vilar, “El Concepto,” 117.

⁹⁰Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*.

⁹¹R 6: 4.

⁹²Habermas, “Moralität und Sittlichkeit.”

⁹³Vilar, “El Concepto,” 121.

⁹⁴For instance, CPrR 5: 110.

the so-called material imperative in Kant's works—starting with the first *Critique*: "Do that through which you will become worthy to be happy."⁹⁵ Seventh, he distinguishes five different versions of the highest good in Kant's work: a personal, a universal, two immanent, and a transcendent highest good. Eighth, he presents three moral functions that the highest good fulfills (something I will develop immediately). Ninth, he signals the practical implications of the highest good for Kant's moral philosophy. Tenth and finally, he looks for reasons that could explain Kant's effort to complement his original, formal ethics, with a material one.

What do all these tell us regarding the problems that orient our present enquiry—i.e., the problems of *dualism*, *heteronomy*, *derivation*, *impossibility*, and *irrelevance*? Not as much as we would like. To begin with, he says nothing regarding *dualism* and *impossibility*—despite being well aware of the Spanish and English literature. Regarding *derivation* and *heteronomy*, in turn, it is clear that Vilar believes that the highest good follows from the moral law and so does not undermine autonomy. Nowhere, though, does he develop such a *derivation* or argue how the highest good does not bring about *heteronomy*. It is only regarding *irrelevance* that Vilar offers something more substantial: the highest good has three ethical functions—the *synthetizing*, *totalizing*, and *destination functions*:

The Synthetizing Function: The first of them [of the functions] is that of *synthesis*, i.e., of solving at the practical level this serious problem of the whole critical philosophy: the problem of the radical separation between the *a priori* and the empirical, and most specially this surprising and more than problematic divorce between the phenomenic and the noumenic man. The concept of the highest good comes to provide a horizon of synthesis, a horizon of reconciliation between freedom and nature, which is at the same time a task for the will. At the level of intention, the good will, the pure moral good (*Gute*), can reconcile itself with the merely sensible or natural good (*Wohl*); at the level of action, the good will, which rests upon its mere inner freedom, finds a way to externalize itself.⁹⁶

The Totalizing Function: In the second place, the concept of the highest good performs also a function of *totalization*, i.e., of integration in a whole, not only the heterogeneous elements that have to be synthetized, but of separated *items* of the same type that have to be integrated in a totalizing sequence. This is precisely what happens with moral actions, which, without the ultimate reference to the highest good, appear as atomic, isolated acts, without a structure of continuity, of coherent and concatenated process.⁹⁷

The Destination Function: In the third and final place, the concept of the highest good performs the important role of *providing a final objective end* to the will (that Kingdom of God in Earth). With it Kant solves the problem of the indeterminacy of human will in the absence of any reference to an end.⁹⁸

⁹⁵CPR A808/B836.

⁹⁶Vilar, "El Concepto," 128.

⁹⁷Vilar, "El Concepto," 128.

⁹⁸Vilar, "El Concepto," 128.

This is all that Vilar says regarding the moral relevance of the highest good. It would help if he unfolded in more detail each of these reasons, or at least if he grounded them in Kant's texts, but he does neither. He could have, for instance, recognized traces of those functions in the preface to the first edition of the *Religion*.

In fact, in the *Religion* we find Kant recognizing that morality has no need for an end "to recognize what duty is or to impel its performance."⁹⁹ The highest good, though, is morally relevant for another reason, namely for answering the "whither" question:

Instructed . . . as to how to operate but not as to the whither, [reason] can itself obtain no satisfaction . . . for it cannot possibly be a matter of indifference to reason how to answer the question, *What is then the result of this right conduct of ours?* . . . It cannot be a matter of indifference to morality . . . whether it does or does not fashion for itself the concept of an ultimate end of all things (although . . . harmonizing with this end does not increase the number of morality's virtues but rather provides them with a special point of reference for the unification of all ends).¹⁰⁰

"Ultimate end of all things," "unification of all ends" — what are these if not traces of the *synthetizing*, *totalizing*, and *destination functions* that Vilar mentions in favor of the highest good? These are, then, rooted in Kant's works. Not only that but, in my opinion, they prove the moral relevance of the highest good (without denying that a fleshier argumentation is required). So despite dealing—although too briefly—with the problem of *irrelevance*, Vilar's defense is prey to the problem of *incompleteness*: he takes us closer to a complete defense of Kant's highest good, but leaves unanswered the problems of *dualism*, *heteronomy*, *derivation*, and *impossibility*.

4. Conclusion

The Beck-Silber controversy as developed in the English-speaking world has had a parallel development in the Spanish literature. Summarizing the findings, we first identified a new criticism: that of *dualism*. It was formulated by Thodoracopoulos, in whose opinion it does not make sense to speak of happiness in corporeal terms and then of virtue as a reward for it in a future immaterial life. The problem of *dualism* has also been addressed indirectly by Aramayo, who suggests Kant's belief in the Christian resurrection of the body—a thesis that, if true (as I have tried to show with the help of Bunch), solves the problem under consideration.

There is also a revisionist, Panea, who focuses on the problem of *irrelevance* and claims that the highest good solves a problem of *motivation*. His defense, though, is prey to the problem of *illusion*—for Kant, the feeling of respect for the moral law is the sole incentive of the will.

Aramayo is a secularizer. In his opinion, there is a secular highest good in Kant's works on the philosophy of history. He tackles the problem of

⁹⁹R 6: 4.

¹⁰⁰R 6: 5.

heteronomy, but his defense is in turn the source of new problems: those of *injustice* and *disloyalty*.

Gómez Caffarena's maximalist defense, in turn, focuses on the problem of *derivation*, but ends up failing by not rooting the highest good in the moral law, falling prey to the problem of *splitting*. Vilar, the other maximalist, focuses on the problem of *irrelevance* and offers several good reasons for the moral importance of the highest good. He does it, though, in an extremely schematic way, leaving the reader craving for more—starting with references to Kant's work.

All of the defenders, in addition, are prey to the problem of *incompleteness*. None of them address all the problems at stake—and not due to an academic division of labor, but more seemingly to the general blindness of not recognizing that the problems linked to the highest good are no less than five.

A complete and flawless defense of Kant's highest good, hence, is still missing in the Spanish-speaking world, but not only there. After all, this discussion mirrors the Beck-Silber controversy as developed in the English-speaking world. Such a defense requires an answer to all the problems at stake—not merely *heteronomy*, *derivation*, *impossibility*, *irrelevance*, but also *dualism*. It also should not be the source of new problems, like those of *illusion*, *injustice*, *disloyalty*, or *splitting*.

Some of the latter set of problems, it is important to add, are inherent to the corresponding styles of defense. The problem of *illusion* is inherent to the revisionist approach, whereas the problems of *injustice* and *disloyalty* are inherent to the secularizer one. This is why the real (and hardest) way to defend Kant's highest good is the maximalist approach. One can fail in the effort, as Gómez Caffarena does by *splitting* Kant's ethics in two, but this does not have to be the case.

Not all arguments in favor of the highest good fail, though. Aramayo's indirect response to the problem of *dualism* and Vilar's case against that of *irrelevance* leave us closer to a complete and flawless defense. But this is only two-fifths of the road, we know now.

Is such a defense possible? I think it is, but its corresponding development exceeds the aim and scope of this paper, which has enriched the discussion in a different way—not only by translating and introducing new interpretations, but also by showing what a proper defense requires and how it should look, as well as by salvaging what is valuable in support of the highest good from the defenses considered above.¹⁰¹

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¹⁰¹For more on my maximalist defense of the highest good, see "Overcoming the Problems of *Heteronomy* and *Derivation*," "El Sumo Bien Kantiano," "Overcoming the Problem of *Impossibility*," and "Kant's Idea of the Highest Good."

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